

# Work and citizenship: crises and alternatives

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## Abstract

One purpose of this article is to refute some commonly held ideas which consider that ongoing changes in work and employment are inevitable and they have positive consequences at the social and individual level. It is subjacent on approach considering that there is no single striking trend while there are alternatives deserving discussion.

The paper starts with analysis on the crises in the Fordist-Keynesian employment regime, the basis of our modern social citizenship. There is no consensus concerning the changes currently taking place in work/employment, are discussed different approaches: the neo-liberal perspective, the techno-optimistic perspective on the information/knowledge society, the management rhetoric on the flexible market principle-driven network organisation, critical perspectives and theories about "the end of work".

Finally, the article provides a reflection on the future of work and citizenship. This characterises four scenarios: the market regulated work centred society, the market society, the renewed work centred society and the society centred on alternative activities. The renewed work centred society is given preference, where citizenship is based on work as a meaningful activity capable of providing autonomy, satisfaction and social integration, where people work less and live more, where individuals have greater control over their time and can better conciliate work with other activities.

**Key-words:** employment regimes; scenarios; labour markets

**JEL codes:** E27; J21; J23; J53; J82

## The crisis in the Fordist-Keynesian employment regime

Modern society was founded on the dual value of the individual as a producer and as a citizen. This modern citizen acquired his/her dignity through working

(Schnapper, 1998). Paid work, that is employment in modern industrial society, provided the core basis for autonomy and citizenship. Social conflict played out over the course of a century resulted in the creation of protective mechanisms for the worker, both in terms of his/her physical integrity in the workplace and against risks such as unemployment, sickness or other reasons for not continuing on in the workforce. Hence, the salaried employee was endowed with an institutional status and employment contracts took on a collective dimension beyond the individual scope. The Fordist-Keynesian model of employment emerged during the three decades of post-war in a social context of full employment and is characterised by the following features:

- Normal or typical employment as a stable and regular job carried out on a full time basis at a company with a Taylorist-Fordist organisational structure, based on a stable contractual bond and a long-term commitment between employer and employee.
- Labour relations are based on legal norms and collective conventions regulating both the terms of the contract and social protection. The working timetable is also subject to regulation.
- A long labour life cycle, uninterrupted and with the perspective of promotion. Predictable professional careers with age and length of service attributing increasing levels of rights and guarantees.
- Trend towards a certain homogenisation in employment conditions and social protection measures.
- Employment underpins citizenship and represents the axis articulating social rights.
- Salaried employment, that is a job, is the main means of social integration.
- A relative balance in the relationship between capital and labour.

However, and particularly in the last couple of decades, the regime has entered into crisis with the major ongoing transformations in economic and social organisation increasingly jeopardising the concepts and representations of work, employment and companies that have been built up since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The crisis in this employment model is characterised by the following features:

- Growing and persistent unemployment.
- Spread of unstable employment types in their majority insecure, badly paid and with a low or no level of social protection.
- A discontinuous labour cycle with interruptions and professional career setbacks.

- Trend towards the differentiation and segmentation of employees, individualisation of working relationships, professional careers and standards of living in general.
- Changes in employment related social protection (health, pensions, unemployment) from a perspective of privatisation and individualisation.
- Changes in the relationship between capital and labour with the decentralisation of negotiations and individualisation of labour relations.

Interpretations of these changes and trends are anything but consensual (Boltansky and Chiapello 1999, Rubery and Grimshaw, 2001; Kovács, 2002). From the perspective of the prevailing ideology, this is a result of the inevitable change wrought by economic laws or by the new technologies. The converging and mutual strengthening of ideas arising from the discourses of neo-liberalism, information society technicist-determinism (techno-optimism) and the management gurus causes a powerful ideology to emerge, along with an unprecedented media, political as well as academic success. The logic of such discourses is characterised by the inevitability and homogeneity of the ongoing changes towards a new era and a new type of society and economy.

For critics, this is no inevitable outcome but rather transformations in employment falling within the current dynamic driving ongoing economic restructuring in the name of competitiveness. This trend derives from the current restructuring of the relationship between capital and labour, fostered by the powerful tools that have been provided by the new information technologies and facilitated by a new form of organisation, the network company (Castells, 1998). Along with the other crises, the crisis in employment threatens social cohesion and citizenship. We are embarking on a new era of inequalities simultaneous to the dysfunction of institutions designed to bring about social ties and solidarity (the crisis in the Welfare State), of the relationship between the economy and society (the crisis in employment) and the means of constructing individual and collective identities (crises of individual and collective agent) (Fitoussi and Rosanvallon, 1997).

## **Perspectives on the work/employment crisis**

### *The neo-liberal perspective*

The neo-liberal perspective is founded on the belief that the power of the market, private enterprise and the individual, in search of maximisation of benefits and minimisation of costs, creates prosperity. Globalisation, as the universalisation of the market, is put forward as a natural inevitable evolution that will bring welfare for all humanity. The liberalisation of markets and the intensification of

competition are believed to be powerful mechanisms of progress that spur the development of the general competitive capacity of economies, thus allowing world-wide distribution of resources to be more effective. Within this perspective the ideal society is the market society which, according to Polányi, means “the subordination of the substance of society itself to the market laws” (Polányi, 1980: 84).

From the neo-liberal standpoint, the present changes in work and employment have to do with the dissemination of a new post-job model, or an entrepreneurial model of work and, therefore, the individualisation of labour relations. Work becomes an individual business within the world market. Each, as a holder of human capital and service-provider, engage in contracts, manage both his/her work and his/her entire career (Handy, 1984; Bridges, 1994; Gruber and Brouiller, 1998; Reich, 2000). Social rights and protection of workers, social regulation and trade-unions are considered as an archaic obstacle to the competitiveness and the new order.

### *The techno-optimist perspective on the information society*

Futurist techno-optimism considers that the information and communication technologies (ICT) lead to an inevitable march towards “the information/cognitive society” centred on production and the exchange of knowledge. Work becomes increasingly knowledge intensive, requiring highly qualified professionals and continuous learning. As professional roles grow more complex, the explosion of knowledge ensues. People become more capable of innovating as producers and consumers, and the performance criteria are founded on quality, innovation, diversification and individualisation (Hage and Powers, 1992, Reich, 2000).

At the same time, the new technologies lead to the post-Taylorist era, in other words the general practice of intelligent work performed in network organisational structures that appeal to the spirit of initiative and adaptability of individuals. Besides this, “the traditional patterns of growth in paid employment, i.e. full time and permanent, appears to be on the decline. (...) Corporate organisation is increasingly turnings towards flexibility and decentralization. The search of flexibility, the development of networked-based cooperation, the increased use of subcontracting, the development of work in teams are some of consequences of information technology” (European Commission, 1995: 23). The development of self-employment, new forms of work organisation known as learning organisations and flexible working hours are other consequences (European Commission, 1995).

Lifelong learning is regarded as one of the essential mechanisms that enable individuals to adapt to the demands made by ICT and, at the same time to reconcile flexibility and security improving employability. It is founded on the presupposition that lifelong learning is a growing opportunity for all by the

general access to information and knowledge in the information society (European Commission, 1996, Kovács, 1998).

The *fétishization* of the ICT, of virtual enterprises, the information highways masks the unequal distribution of strategic knowledge-intensive activities and intelligent work among countries, companies and within companies. It also conceals the profound inequalities in learning opportunities, computer Taylorism practised in many ICT-based activities, with particular reference to call centres; and corresponding extended timetables and stress caused by the increasing intensity of work, anguish and suffering arising from the uncertainty regarding tomorrow's job (Buscatto, 2002; Bono, 2005; Kovács and Casaca, 2007).

### *Management discourse on flexibility*

According to management discourse, the present labour changes are manifestations of the post-bureaucratic, post-Taylorist paradigm. Management gurus praise the benefits of flexible rationalisation<sup>6</sup> in making enterprises more competitive in the global market. The great objective is to rationalise and optimise the work processes, by introducing flexibility into the management processes, the employer-employee relationship and the capacity of response to the market changes. Flexible rationalisation promises to reduce costs inherent to the work factor and to simultaneously obtain functional flexibility through a process-centred work reorganisation (Davenport, 1992; Hammer and Champy, 1993). This discourse exerts a powerful influence on organisation practices and therefore shapes the socio-economic conditions in which we live.

Not even frequent failures affect fascination by management fashions. The power of this discourse is due to the fact that it can offer powerful symbols of efficiency, legitimisation and promise solutions for all the *ills* affecting the economy. In a context of great complexity, instability and uncertainty the problems are presented as being simple and the solutions the right ones. A company that has undergone re-engineering acquires the image of an innovative enterprise and, in this way, attracts customers and its market value rises (Abrahamson, 1997).

Flexible rationalisation praised the subjectivity and autonomy of the individual that are the driving principles to placing human resources at the service of companies. The emphasis is placed on holding the individual responsible, in the individualisation of pay and benefits, of careers, training, information and communication and the evaluation of personal potential. For critics of this perspective, it falls within a management rationalisation strategy seeking to eliminate the limitations set by the regulatory framework governing the

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<sup>6</sup> Among their methods one finds, among others: *total quality management, just-in-time, downsizing, re-engineering and outsourcing*.

utilisation of labour by employers (Linhart, 2002). The trend is not for individualism-emancipation providing greater liberty and the capacity for action to prevail but rather that of individualism-weakening that leaves the individual as an isolated individual submitted to insecurity and the weakening of social ties (Fitoussi and Rosenvallon, 1997).

The idealised firm by the dominant discourse is flexible and lean, formed by a relatively small, stable core of managers and specialists and versatile skilled employees. The practice of resorting to the use of temporary workers and subcontracting to other enterprises and independent workers ensures the flexibility required by market fluctuations. The future belongs to the hyper-flexible company with independents organised in network form (Handy, 1984; Bridges, 1994).<sup>7</sup>

Besides referring to benefits to the company, the apologists of flexible working patterns recall the benefits to the workers, such as greater autonomy in the work and in the management of time, as well the possibility to harmonise work and family life. The postulate of the self-management of time conceals submission of the working time to companies' needs according to market fluctuations.

And this optimistic perspective prevents one from seeing that a substantial slice of flexible forms of employment involves precariousness and few prospects of professional advancement, which leads to an atmosphere of distress and insecurity. This blind enthusiasm accounts for the fact that it is precisely in this terrain of vulnerability that are enacted the enchanting rituals of the managers and the increasingly demanding appeals for personal dynamism (Rosenvallon, 1997). This type of appeal fits into the myth of independent work. Management gurus and post-Taylorism theorists enthusiastically welcome the replacement of the wage-earning worker by the post-wage service-supplier (Gruber and Brouillet, 1998), entrepreneurial (flexible and autonomous) individuals who manage their own careers and take upon themselves health insurance and retirement contributions (Bridges, 1994).

According to the critics, we are not faced with a new model of work, but with a return to piecework, where the supplier of a work force is held responsible for his input, within the unstable global production system (D'Iribarne, 1997). The transformation of employees into self-employed workers is a modern version of the modern journeyman, with no security, no prospects, and no benefits (Adam, 1998). André Gorz demystifies the post-Fordist figure of the independent worker, and shows that "these 'independents' are paid and work in conditions that wage earners consider unacceptable" (Gorz, 1997).

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<sup>7</sup> The recentred enterprise will be the model of the future in those technology-intensive sectors (technological production, banking, insurance) and the network of independent workers in the human-resource intensive sectors (market services to enterprises and private individuals) (Ducatte, 1995).

For the new management rhetoric the post-bureaucratic company is regulated by the market principle. In this sense, factors such as identification with the company and the loyalty become obsolete. According to Hammer, one of the best known gurus in re-engineering, the company offers its employees the opportunity to achieve personal success and, in exchange, the employees apply their initiative to the creation of value for the customers and thereby profits for the company (Hammer, 1998).<sup>8</sup>

At the same time the growing shortening of the life cycle is stated as an inevitable, general trend. This not only applies to products but also to organisations, labour relations and career, etc. Settling, stability, which is essential to community life, is held to be inappropriate to a changing environment. They therefore have a negative connotation and synonymous with backwardness and inefficiency.

The dominant discourse has created the myth of the flexibility of the labour market, of the company and the individual. The labour market cannot be regulated to allow work to become a source of competitiveness and to enable employment growth. Employers and politicians have insistently pinpointed the rigidity of the European labour market as responsible for the lack of job creation. However, it has been proven that there exists no direct connection between flexibility and an increase in jobs and the influence of labour-market regulations on unemployment is minimal or non-existent (OECD, 1999). At the same time, there is, in all countries, a considerable amount of flexible working practices<sup>9</sup> and, in many cases, with similar growth rates, both in highly-regulated countries and low-regulated countries (Brewster; Mayne, Tregaskis, 1997). Despite this, the belief perseveres whereby the increase in labour market flexibility is a factor in reducing unemployment.

### *The critical perspective*

The critical perspective highlights the increasing trend towards domination of global economy by concentrated powerful business enterprises and polarisation between a small influential elite, the knowledge class (the knowledge experts or the symbolic analysts) and the growing mass of workers whose working conditions tend to deteriorate. The prevalent employment forms and working

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<sup>8</sup> "Loyalty and hard work are by themselves quaint relics, about as important to contemporary business success as the ability to make a perfect dry martini. Indeed, organizations must now urge employees to put loyalty to the customer over loyalty to the company - because that is the only way the company will thrive" (Hammer, 1998: 42-43).

<sup>9</sup> Other terms are used, such as vulnerable, atypical, non-standard and contingent employment.

conditions in the third world countries tend to spread also in the industrially more advanced countries (Beck, 2000). There is a trend to "informalisation" and "de-institutionalisation" of employment (Galini, 2002).

In today's society, unemployment and underemployment coexist with the increasing duration and intensity of work (Gorz: 1997, Schor: 1991, Petrella: 1994). From a critical stance, recent employment changes are signs of both a labour-based and social polarisation, leading to the erosion of social rights and social cohesion in societies (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999; Petrella, 1994; Castel, 1995, 1998; Castells 1998; Castillo, 1999, 2003, 2005; Beck 2000; Garibaldo 2005; Group of Lisboa, 1994; Sennett, 1998).

According to the critical perspective, neo-liberalism promotes a "state dispossession" programme (Petrella, 1999), the "methodical destruction of the collective" (Bourdieu, 1998a), the elimination of social regulation designed to reconcile the market economy and social cohesion (Castel, 1995). This subordination of society to the market laws and to the logic of competitive globalisation involves the reduction of the company to a profit-making machine, increasingly precarious work, a deterioration of the quality of work and of the integrating potential of work. Execution of this programme is simplified by the existence of a great imbalance of power in the capital-labour relationship.

Defence of the work increasingly depends on individual negotiations. The concentrated power of the key economic actors (huge transnational enterprise and their alliances, global institutions such as, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation, is not or is poorly counterbalanced by labour side. As Petrella warns, "human resource work has no social voice, or social representation. Nor does it any longer have as such, civil, political, social and cultural rights: essentially speaking, it has a decisive contribution to make in the smooth operating, development and higher profit of the company" (Petrella, 1994: 28).

Competition among countries and regions to attract foreign investment, through subsidies and fiscal benefits to improve infrastructures and achieve cheaper human resources leads to a downturn spiral in wages and working conditions. As Castells shows, a paradoxical situation arises: never before was work more central in the value-creating process. But never before were workers more vulnerable, as they have been converted into isolated workers, subcontracted in a flexible network, whose horizon is unknown, even to the network itself (Castells, 1998). There is a divorce between economic institutions and society, a lack of legitimatisation and of democratic control on their lives by people (Garibaldo, 2005).

Enthusiasm for creativity and personal dynamism produced by flexibilisation and individualisation in a network system does not enable one to see the negative consequences of competitive, flexible capitalism in professional life (Sennett: 1998). Flexible capitalism obstructs the path towards a career, taking one from



one job to another and one group to another in a lateral movement. Security and loyalty cease to exist. Decisions are taken according to short-term perspectives, and the skills to adapt and face up to challenges are the leading qualities expected of a professional.

Individuals change jobs, posts and places of activity, which makes it hard to lead a coherent, meaningful existence. There is only coherence and comfort for those at the top. Experience, skills lose their value in favour of the capacity to sell oneself and adapt. This character-corroding<sup>10</sup> is caused by flexible capitalism. According to Bourdieu (1998b), we are facing with a new model of domination based on rational management of insecurity aiming to co-opt workers into accepting their exploration (*flexploration*).

### *Theories about "the end of work" and "the end of the centrality of work"*

Since the 80s an increasing number of publications have appeared on "the end of work" and on crisis in the work society<sup>11</sup>. The author, who made the thesis of the end of work most widespread, from a techno-pessimist perspective, is Jeremy Rifkin. According to this author, information technologies will put an end to a large amount of the jobs. In the high-tech economy, the only sector that is growing is the knowledge sector which is unable to create employment for the millions whose jobs will be axed in the three traditional branches (Rifkin, 1995).

For those authors who defend the thesis of "the end of centrality of work", paid work has lost its subjective quality of organising centre of human activities, of self-esteem, and social references. Paid work is no longer the main integrating factor. Work and production lose their capacity to structure and organise society, alternative social integration and social inclusion activities appear in addition to new scenarios, new actors and new rationalities (Gorz, 1997; Méda, 1995; Rifkin, 1995; Beck, 2000).

In rejecting the disappearance of work, Castillo displays the fluid state and growing invisibility of work (Castillo, 1999; 2005). The present forms of work conceal the place where one produces. Today, it is increasingly difficult to know (and even less to see) who does what, who designs, makes and builds a given

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<sup>10</sup> Character is expressed in terms of loyalty, mutual commitment and the setting up of long term objectives.

<sup>11</sup> However, already in the late 60s, one anticipated a society centred not on work but on leisure as a result of the scientific and technological revolution. But we can go further here. On the basis of the possibilities created by the development of productive forces, particularly technical ones, Marx mentions a society centred on free activities, whose wealth is measured by available time (non-work time) for the free development of each individual. Work as a heteronomous activity belongs to the sphere of necessity and not liberty (Marx, 1977).

good or service. The productive processes are dissolved over territory, among different nations and regions (Castillo, 2003).

As regards this debate, I defend a perspective that allows for the co-existence of different and even contradictory tendencies in the evolution of patterns of work and employment. Recent developments are not manifestations of a unique striking trend of a new era heralded by the abovementioned theories, that is the widespread practice of intelligent work, the end of employment, the general practice of independent work or, in fact, the end of work. There is a trend towards increasing diversification, heterogeneity of work and employment and even towards its fluidity and invisibility in the complex network organizations, within and among companies, rendering its understanding and research more difficult.

Therefore, we are not confronted by the end of work/employment. Work continues to play an important role in the life of people and in social life in general. The tendency to reduce employment and flexibilise work, to individualise labour relations has been presented by the dominant discourse as an ineluctable development. However, they belong to the present economic restructuring dynamic in favour of competitiveness and they are results of deliberate actions in the neo-liberal logic. But, there are other alternatives, which deserve discussion.

### **Scenarios of the evolution of work/employment and citizenship**

From the neo-liberal perspective, the solution for the employment crisis involves moving towards deepening the logic of the market. In turn, for theories pointing to the end of the centrality of work, the solution lies in the development of a new type of society focused on alternative activities. However, in my perspective, we further have to take into consideration the alternative of a renewed and humanised work centred society.

Therefore, we can contrast tendencies of development or possible futures using scenarios. There are different types of scenarios and a different methodology of scenario according to diverse proposes. (Moniz, 2008; Moniz, Paulos, Bannink, 2009). Scenarios presented in this article can be considered as analytical tools. The principal aim is to stimulate reflexion and debate on tendencies of development and alternative futures. The following table sets out the alternative scenarios for the development of work/employment based on the two core variables: the degree to which the centrality of work/employment prevails over alternative activities and how far market regulation prevails over social regulation. The interchange between these two variables enables four scenarios to be set out:

Table - Scenarios for developments in work/employment

Social regulation	3: Renewed and humanised work centred society	4: Society of chosen time and of multi-activity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulated labour market</li> <li>• Work shaped by articulating economic and social objectives and human centred technical-organisational options</li> <li>• Reduction of working time</li> <li>• Identity and integration by humanised work</li> <li>• Dialogue, participation and negotiation</li> <li>• Citizenship is associated with renewed work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible and reduced work</li> <li>• Alternative activities</li> <li>• Decent and regular income, not dependent on employment</li> <li>• Separation between citizenship and work/employment</li> </ul>
Market regulation	1: Market regulated work society	2: Market society
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deregulated labour market</li> <li>• Work: cost to be reduced</li> <li>• Unemployment</li> <li>• Polarisation, diversification, individualisation of work</li> <li>• Precariousness</li> <li>• Debility of trade-unions</li> <li>• Spiral downturn in wages and working conditions</li> <li>• Selective social citizenship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Predominance of economic values</li> <li>• Deregulated labour market</li> <li>• Work: cost to be reduced</li> <li>• Mass unemployment</li> <li>• New jobs created by the mercantilisation of all activities (education, culture, caring) tend to be precarious</li> <li>• Debility of trade-unions</li> <li>• Spiral downturn in wages and working conditions</li> <li>• No recognised social citizenship</li> </ul>
Centrality of work/employment		Centrality of alternative activities

### *Scenario 1: market regulated work society*

Reforms and measures to liberalise the markets, deregulate the economy, privatise the strategic, profitable sectors, liberalise the labour market, reduce social protection, and hold individuals responsible are promoted in all geographic areas so as to make more dynamic economic activities and enable them to more effectively integrate into the world economy. Economic dynamism and social justice<sup>12</sup> can only be guaranteed by the market forces claim together American conservatives and neo-conservatives, social democrats and 'third way' European socialists. According to this perspective, the aim of good public management is to remove all regulations that may hamper the free market game<sup>13</sup>. Global financial

<sup>12</sup> From the liberal stance the *Welfare State* penalizes individual initiative, through its redistribution policy and is a factor of injustice. In turn, as the market allows all individuals to compete with one another, to ensure their welfare through their initiative and creativity, it is a factor of justice. The same ideas are defended by Giddens, *The Third Way*, London, Policy Press, 1998.

<sup>13</sup> This does not preclude claim State occasional intervention, as recently happened to save banks.

integration precludes any autonomous national monetary policies and, in doing so, the main economic parameters of the restructuring processes tend to be identical<sup>14</sup>.

Hegemony and liberalisation of the financial markets and, thanks to the ICT, intensification of the circulation of financial capital increase speculative behaviour and thus, in the long term, productive investment suffers in favour of short-term profitability with a consequent increasing in unemployment (Eatwell, 1995). The maximum profitability rates required according to investor interests in rapid and high returns calls companies for the minimisation of labour costs and the maximisation of productive efficiency.

Hence the reason for centring on greatest value generating key activities (*core business*) and the externalisation, subcontracting and increasing delocalisation of other activities. This is also the reason for the simplification and decentralisation of business structures. The restructuring strategies are broadly inspired by the concepts of *lean production* and reengineering and may be summarised as "produce more, better and faster with less". The underlying rationalisation of business restructuring and modernisation processes implies a reduction in and greater flexibility of labour, raising levels of flexible, fluid or peripheral labour as well as the delocalisation of companies and operational tasks to low wage zones (Kovács, 2002; Castillo 2003). Company restructuring enabled by ICT and driven by global competition results in the spread of a new form of organisation of production based on decentralisation, fragmentation and geographic dispersion of productive activities integrated into networks by ICT (Castells, 1998). The increasingly decentralised and dispersed production implies the concentration of power by key economic actors, consequently "concentration without centralization" (Harrison, 1994: 9).

This focusing on the central activities brings about a fundamental differentiation between two types of employees: core workers linked to the key activities and peripheral or generic workers.

Core workers are well waged, employers are interested in their continuation providing the appropriate conditions for the development of new skills (including IT, entrepreneur and management competences) essential to the carrying out of the central activities. However, simultaneously, the externalisation of the remaining activities implies the spread of flexible forms of employment, frequently precarious, and consequent strong growth in the number of generic employees that may easily be hired, fired and replaced by workers from other regions in accordance with the need to adapt to market fluctuations (Atkinson,

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<sup>14</sup> Here is a case of the rise of global information capitalism as a network of global, integrated capital, whose movements and variable logic determine the economy and have an influence on societies (Castells, 1998).

1984, 1987; Harrison, 1994; Castells, 1998; Boltansky and Chiapello, 1999)<sup>15</sup>. Brand companies, for example, restrict their scope to the field of design, the coordination of companies subcontracted in low labour cost regions and the retail of their products.

It is increasingly difficult to ascertain where something is produced and what it is produced by. Finding out information is no easy task. For example, SETEM, a non-governmental organisation, ended up having to purchase shares in Inditex Group<sup>16</sup>, one of the world largest worldwide fashion distributors-chain, to find out just where its clothing is produced as part of a "clean clothing" campaign<sup>17</sup>. This campaign, underway since 2001, seeks to monitor textiles produced for a range of different transnational companies and has discovered recourse to child labour and precarious employment conditions (Castillo, 2003).

The application of new management principles designed to promote human resource investment tends to be limited to the most competent and/or those in possession of key skills difficult to find elsewhere in the labour market. Meanwhile, peripheral groups are managed from a short term and market logic perspective in which the "human factor" is nothing more than a cost to be reduced. The growth in a poorly paid pool of labour encourages competition based on the reduction of labour costs.

The increase in unemployment and precarious employment is not merely a consequence of economic failure and loss of market share by companies. Frequently, private and public companies with good financial results set about cutting back on their workforce demonstrating just how common compulsory redundancy has become as a day-to-day act of management.

When companies announce major job cuts, their stock market value rises. Companies with good results may end up closed when the return on investment is less than that generated by other companies. Efforts designed to increase productivity and quality levels are overwhelmed by financial speculation undermining long-term investment in companies (Peyrelevade, 2008). The economy becomes the prisoner of "impatient capital" (Harrison 1994, Sennett, 2005).

The spread of flexible labour practices results not only in a simple duality

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<sup>15</sup> There is an increasing polarisation of working hours: the core workers tend to work extended hours (overwork), while the peripheral are usually involved in part-time work and underemployment situations (e.g. on-call, casual, insecure and temporary work). In both cases, flexible patterns of working time are stressful, whether due to the compression and squeezing of other social times or the uncertainty regarding both jobs and income (Kovacs and Casaca, 1997)

<sup>16</sup> Owner of the following brands: Zara, Pull and Bear, Massimo Dutti, Bershka, Stradivarius, Oysho, Zara Home y Kiddy's Class

<sup>17</sup> For further details on this campaign, please go to: <http://www.ropalimpia.org/>

between well paid core workers and peripheral staff with uncertain and poorly paid jobs but also in the segmentation of human resources by companies. There are great differences between workers in stable employment and workers in flexible employment as regards professional paths, wages, working conditions, autonomy etc. However, the workers in a flexible employment situation do not constitute a homogeneous group, there are different trajectories of flexibility and flexible jobs (qualifying flexibility, transitory precarity-inducing flexibility, and continuous precarity-inducing flexibility) (Kovács, 2005). This aspect is driven both by the growing diffusion of flexible forms of employment and by the destabilisation of stable positions.

There is a brake on upwards social mobility. For a substantial proportion of employees, those finding themselves in a disadvantaged labour market position, it seems highly difficult to set about improving their employability. These are, in the main, females, the younger and older age groups with low levels of schooling. Their mobility (lateral) tends to be limited to poorly qualified positions whether within the same company or when swapping one company for another and displaying characteristics that perpetuate their labour market fragility, specifically the lack of opportunity for training and promotion.

Within the context of high differentiation, the defense of interests related to work factor becomes increasingly left to individual level negotiations. Trade unions are undermined and the defence of worker interests at the transnational level is poor or non-existent. Consequently, trade unions have difficulty to integrate increasingly segmented and individualised workers as the extent of flexible employment spreads.

The neo-liberal objective is to transform the employment contract based on the status of the employee (collective identity) that grants a series of rights in market contracts in favour of individual negotiations. Similarly, in these negotiations, the upper hand tends to belong to the employer who defines the terms of negotiation and justifying changes based on the impositions of technology and the marketplace. Within the context of globalisation and ICT, companies have gained greater room for maneuver in their deployment of labour and the competition between countries and regions to attract foreign direct investment further fosters a deterioration of salaries and employment conditions.

Work ceases to be a right and becomes a resource designed to ensure high capital profitability levels while the worker, no longer a person with rights, becomes a cost. There is no recognised social citizenship, citizenship could be amputated or suspended, the emphasis is on the liberty to follow individual strategies and acquire individual goods (Petrella, 1999).

### *Scenario 2: market society*

The deepening of the current economic logic results in a "market society", that is, the subordination of society to the logic of competitive globalisation. All aspects

of life are turned into economic issues and goods; economic values become central, to the detriment of cultural and social values. More jobs are created by the mercantilisation of all activities (health, cultural, educational, research, caring, etc.) This type of development means the even greater spread of the multiple forms of job insecurity and precariousness in addition to the degradation of employment quality and the integrating potential of work/employment.

It would also mean the ending of social regulation designed to balance the market economy and social cohesion. Unemployment, destabilisation and precariousness are omnipresent risks. The evolution within the logic of this scenario implies growing inequalities between individuals in terms of employment and citizenship.

### *Scenario 3: renewed and humanised work centred society*

This alternative is based on the idea that work will continue to structure and provide coherence to the life of the individual. There is no evidence that paid work or employment is losing any of its centrality. The results of various recently carried out research projects show that employment is a vital factor in the lives of people. Various studies have also concluded that there has been an effective increase in the amount of time worked and an intensification of work (Schor, 1991; Reich, 2000). Social prestige is thus henceforth defined as: the greater the time and effort put into the mercantile sphere, the greater the investment in one's professional life and the higher the social profile (Grozelier, 1998).

The main problem is not the end of work but the wealth of work devoid of quality which fails to live up to the expectations of persons or gives little or no guarantee and stability of income and working conditions to enable them to enjoy lasting integration in a reference community. In this way, notwithstanding the central nature of work, it is itself weakened as a factor of social integration, especially in those situations where the instability of professional life is accompanied by unstable family situations or else with situations of social isolation arising from the weakening of the welfare state. Contrary to the ideas proposed by those, proclaiming the end of work, employment remains a central feature of our societies, the source of individual and collective identities, social cohesion and integration. Simultaneously, paid work seems set to remain tied to citizenship and consequently a fundamental aspect of contemporary societies (Schnapper, 1998).

The renovation and humanisation of work centred society involves the redistribution of socially useful work, the reduction in working timetables and flexibility achieved without precariousness and conciliating economic and social objectives through dialogue, negotiation and participation at all level. This alternative requires a type of economic and social development focusing not only on quantitative objectives such as economic growth or more jobs but also on qualitative factors including the transformation of work into an interesting and

meaningful activity, capable of providing autonomy, satisfaction and social integration. ICT are able to bring about simultaneous improvements to productivity, employment and quality of life whenever a human-centred or humanised flexibility perspective prevails in the technological and organisational options taken (Kovács, 1998; 2002, Oeij and Wiezer, 2002). Flexible forms of employment associated not only with economic objectives but also with social and individual objectives can enable greater individual control over time, better conciliating work and family life, cycles of life and other activities.

The development of society within the logic of this scenario implies a citizenship based on the renewed and humanised work. Work retains its centrality but the reduction in time opens up the space for other activities (cultural, civic, etc.).

This renewal of work needs to create new regulatory forms and functions extend beyond national level regulation. There have to be effective mechanisms for the implementation of decent work principles or core labour standards (ILO)<sup>18</sup> in the defence of worker interests on a truly global scale (Santos, 1998).

### *Scenario 4: Society of chosen time and multi-activities*

Those proclaiming for the “end of working society” present a society centred around alternative activities (autonomous, voluntary activities, active participation in civil and political sphere) as the only alternative to market regulated work centred society. One of the proposals as the means of solving the employment crisis has to do with the development of a third sector of the economy bearing a new post-market or social paradigm by associating it with a social income (Rifkin) or one of citizenship (Beck)<sup>19</sup>. The third sector is the preferred place for the development of a new type of society in which political and social aspects are not subordinated to the economy and in which paid work is no longer the main integrating factor. According to Jeremy Rifkin, through a set of incentives, governments should promote the third sector or the social economy, thus creating an alternative for those whose work is no longer required by the market economy (Rifkin, 1995). People will have their roles and

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<sup>18</sup> Decent work means productive work in which rights are protected, which generates an adequate income, with adequate social protection. It also means sufficient work, in the sense that all should have full access to income-earning opportunities. It marks the high road to economic and social development, a road in which employment, income and social protection can be achieved without compromising workers' rights and social standards. Tripartism and social dialogue are both objectives in their own right, guaranteeing participation and democratic process, and a means of achieving all the other strategic objectives of the ILO. The evolving global economy offers opportunities from which all can gain, but these have to be grounded in participatory social institutions if they are to confer legitimacy and sustainability on economic and social policies. ILO site: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc87/rep1.htm#1.%20The%20primary%20goal>

<sup>19</sup> Beck talks of the development of voluntary citizenship activities.



responsibilities; they will find a meaning to their lives. Besides the unemployed or the under-employed the social economy will embrace all those who may wish to direct their free time (voluntaries) to these activities (services) of use to the community (health care, support for the needy and old people, education, research, art, culture).

It is an interesting alternative, although it does raise certain issues. Does not the third sector face the danger of becoming a ghetto of those who find no job in the two other sectors and are less employable? Will there not emerge a divided economy with a profound rift between the market and the tertiary sector? Does not the option in favour of developing the tertiary sector as the cradle of a new type of society deviate attention from the need to transform other sectors, particularly that of the market? Should one agree, in this sector, to even more freely strive for short-term profit in the market logic, thus giving rise to even greater social and environmental costs?

Another alternative to the market regulated work centred society is the "society of chosen times or of multi-activities". The increase in unemployment and precarious employment, intensified fragmentation and of social exclusion is a trend which, according to Gorz, may lead to the retrospective idealisation of paid work, of the work society, while forgetting that it is a case of work without interest, devoid of intrinsic meaning, constrained, oppressing and instrumental in gaining access to consumption.<sup>20</sup> In the new conception of work, it ceases to assume the central role peculiar to industrial society. Work can and should be discontinuous, but should be the result of choice, without increasing the discontinuity of each individual's income. Security of an income is the first condition of this new type of society. It has to do with entitlement to an adequate, stable income as an unconditional universal guarantee which does not depend on a permanent stable occupation of a full-time job, but one which enables the individual to live decently and refuse degrading occupations and working conditions (Gorz, 1997). The working ethic gives way to a living ethic, of reciprocity, support and voluntary networks. Correspondingly, each individual can gain the security and the earnings necessary to turn down jobs and unacceptable terms of employment. Work is no longer the only means of social integration open to individuals with participation in other activities becoming of greater importance.

Ulrich Beck also defends the multi-activity society alternative in which paid work is one form of activity, among many others – family and parental work, voluntary work, political activity (Beck, 2000). This alternative requires a profound change

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<sup>20</sup> According to the author, the traditional conception of work overlooks the fact that it never operated as a source of social cohesion and integration, nor was it work in the philosophical and anthropological sense (as a practical, sensorial activity, whereby individuals exteriorise their subjectivity and creativity, and seek self-accomplishment). It fulfilled the specific needs of society, but not necessarily the needs of the individuals that performed the work.

in mentalities so that both men and women participate equally in multiple activities. At the same time, the alternative incorporates an active civil society. While in the first phase of modernity, citizenship derived from employment and only those people engaged in paid employment were considered active. In this alternative society, citizenship derives from active participation in the civil and political spheres. As employment loses its centrality in the life of societies and individuals in favour of alternative activities, there emerges a separation between citizenship and employment. Hence, the development of society within this logic implies citizenship moves on from being rooted in employment and paid work to be based on participation in alternative activities, specifically, in the civil and public sphere.

This appealing alternative is undoubtedly an important reference to criticise the *status quo*, but it involves risks. Orientation towards alternative activities signifies that work ceases to be a strategic space to construct a better future. As Castel notes, it means abandoning the work front and risking giving up on the possibility of regulating the market, while forgetting that market regulation was built on the foundation of work (Castel, 1995).

This alternative also signifies that paid work ceases to be a form of emancipation for women, a source of their finance independence and autonomy. The discourse about the end of work conceals the specific relationship of woman to paid work and ignores the risk of returning home and the associated sexual division of activities. This return can enclose the woman in a family sphere and its respective domestic tasks.

The risk is not only giving up the possibility of regulating the market, but also giving up other alternatives, namely the renovation and humanisation of the work society. As Robert Castel demonstrates, there is no credit-worthy alternative to the paid work centred society. A way out of the slump is possible, but this has nothing to do with the building of the beautiful utopia of a brave new world where all the reveries of the "project-makers" blossom freely (Castel, 1995). Work will continue to structure and provide coherence to the lives of individuals, but it will be renewal.

In this way it becomes possible for everyone to have a place in the *continuum* of socially recognised positions based on effective work, decent living conditions and social rights. Alternative activities and alternative forms of participation may co-exist with reorganised and revalorised work. The postulate that work serves no integrating, identifying function and the emphasis placed upon alternative activities to work deviate one's attention from the importance of transforming salaried work.

It has been sufficiently demonstrated that work can be organised with social and psychological aims, to become an activity with an intrinsic interest and meaning, allowing autonomy, the use and development of knowledge and skills, participation in achieving objectives, opportunities of enjoying a variety of

interpersonal relationships and obtaining recognition.

### **Conclusion**

A flexible economy within the logic of a competitive global market, based on the neo-liberal ideology and practices, implies the reduction of employment and the spread of unstable forms of employment, mobility, irregular and individualised professional careers. Workers are demanded they be able to manage their own careers, redefining their employment position and competences, winning new work opportunities (services to be provided) and thereby acquiring citizenship. There is strong pressure on the individualisation of labor relationships and on the reduction of work to the private sphere, that is, on the elimination of social rights associated with paid work. This trend has been presented by the dominant discourse as an ineluctable evolution. Social sciences of work have to defend the possibility of shaping work in accordance with social objectives.

In contrast to the ideas proposed by authors defending the end of work, the latter remains one of the most determinant factors in the life chances enjoyed by individuals. Work continues to play an important role in the life of people and in social life in general. Forecasts regarding the leisure society, based on the technological revolution, have not materialised. As statistical data show the majority of the active population continues to be salaried employed. Working time remains fairly high. There are not less wage earners but there are more vulnerable workers exposed to the risk of precariousness and unemployment. Access to earnings, social integration, social position, the satisfaction gained from feeling useful and recognised and self-realisation continue to greatly depend on salaried work. The stability of employment and wage rates is essential not only for the reproduction of human resources but also for the effective working of the credit and taxation systems as well as social reproduction.

The search for alternatives does not lie in the path of futurology. Above all it follows the study of the present situation of work in its very complexity, which is our task. Analysis of the situation and the identification and discussion of alternatives are indispensable in preventing the evolution of work from being left to the "inevitable". Within the framework of dominant thought there are no alternative futures that call for the reflection and participation of social actors with a view to making political options. Reflection limits itself to the best way of adapting. Individuals, enterprises, institutions, social relations have to adapt to the changes brought about by ICT and planetary mercantilisation derived from the unchangeable laws of the economy.

Where paid work continues to determine living conditions and life chances and configures the social existence of the majority of people, promoting policies designed to foster full employment and checking the degradation and

precariousness in employment practices emerge as political imperatives. Citizenship can and should be connected to paid work within the logic of a renewed humanised work centred society. The quality of citizenship is linked to the quality of work/employment.

This is the approach underlying a society favouring the "high road" to economic development. This road is based on improvements to efficiency and innovation and ensures that through economic gains come higher salaries, better social conditions, safeguarding the rights of employees and encouraging the norms appropriate for social protection, participation, dialogue and intense social bargaining. And this "high road" to economic development fits within a different type of globalisation focusing on the reduction of inequality and economic, social and ecological imbalances.

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